
C A U T I O N

Recommended in the Use and Application

OF SCRIPTURE LANGUAGE.

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S E R M O N.

1881

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A
SERMON
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*Caution recommended in the Use and Application
of Scripture Language.*

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S E R M O N

PREACHED JULY 15, 1777,

IN THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CARLISLE,

AT THE
V I S I T A T I O N

OF THE
RIGHT REVEREND
E D M U N D,
LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

By WILLIAM PALEY, M. A.

LATE FELLOW OF CHRIST COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, AND VICAR
OF DALSTON AND ST. LAWRENCE IN APPLEBY.

L O N D O N:

Printed and sold by R. FAULDER, *New Bond-Street*; and
T. MERRIL, at *Cambridge*, 1782.

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of Scripture Language.

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SERMON

PREACHED JULY 15. 1775.

IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CARLISLE,

AT THE

VISITATION

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND

EDMUND

LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
E D M U N D,
LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE,

THIS
DISCOURSE

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF GREAT RESPECT AND GRATITUDE,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST DUTIFUL,

AND MOST OBLIGED SERVANT AND CHAPLAIN,

W. PALEY.

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

EDMUND

LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE

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DISCOURSE

WITH SENTIMENT OF GREAT RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST OBLIGED

AND MOST OBLIGED SERVANT AND CHAPLAIN

W. PALFREY

2 PET. iii. 15, 16.

EVEN AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO,
 ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN UNTO
 HIM, HATH WRITTEN UNTO YOU ; AS ALSO
 IN ALL HIS EPISTLES SPEAKING IN THEM
 OF THOSE THINGS ; IN WHICH ARE SOME
 THINGS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD, WHICH
 THEY THAT ARE UNLEARNED, AND UNSTA-
 BLE, WREST, AS THEY DO ALSO THE OTHER
 SCRIPTURES, UNTO THEIR OWN DESTRUC-
 TION.

IT must not be dissembled that there are
 many real difficulties in the Christian
 scriptures ; whilst at the same time more, I
 believe, and greater, may justly be imputed
 to certain maxims of interpretation, which
 have obtained authority without reason, and
 are received without enquiry.—One of these,
 as I apprehend, is the expecting to find in
 the

the present circumstances of christianity, a meaning for, or something answering to, every appellation and expression which occurs in scripture ; or in other words, the applying to the personal condition of Christians at this day, those titles, phrases, propositions and arguments, which belong solely to the situation of christianity at its first institution.

I am aware of an objection which weighs much with many serious tempers, namely, that to suppose any part of scripture to be inapplicable to us, is to suppose a part of scripture to be useless ; which seems to detract from the perfection we attribute to these oracles of our salvation.—To this I can only answer, that it would have been one of the strangest things in the world, if the writings of the new testament had not, like all other books, been composed for the apprehension, and consequently adapted to the circumstances, of the persons they were addressed to ; and that it would have been equally strange, if the great, and in many respects the inevitable, alterations, which have taken place in

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those circumstances, did not vary the application of scripture language.

I design in the following discourse to propose some examples of this variation, from which you will judge, as I proceed, of the truth and importance of our general observation.

1. At the time the scriptures were written, none were *baptized* but converts, and none were converted but from conviction, and conviction produced for the most part a corresponding reformation of life and manners.—Hence *Baptism* was only another name for conversion, and conversion was supposed to be sincere—in this sense was our Savior's promise, “ ‘ he that believeth and is *baptized* shall be saved,” and in the same his command to St. Paul, “ ‘ arise and be *baptized* and wash away thy sins ;” this was that *baptism* “ for the remission of sins,” to which St. Peter ‘ invited the Jews upon the day of Pentecost ; that “ *washing* of regeneration,” by which as St. Paul ‘ writes to Titus “ he saved us.”

‘ Mark xvi. 16.

‘ Acts xxii 16.

‘ Acts ii. 38.

‘ Titus iii. 5.

Now when we come to speak of the *baptism* which obtains in most christian churches at present, where no conversion is supposed, or possible; it is manifest, that if these expressions be applied at all, they must be applied with extreme qualification and reserve.

2. The community of christians were at first a handful of men connected amongst themselves by the strictest union, and divided from the rest of the world by a real difference of principle and persuasion, and what was more observable, by many outward peculiarities of worship and behaviour.—This society considered collectively, and as a *body*, were set apart from the rest of mankind for a more gracious dispensation, as well as actually distinguished by a superior purity of life and conversation.—In this view, and in opposition to the unbelieving world, they were denominated in scripture by titles of great seeming dignity and import—they were “⁵ elect,” “called,” “saints”—they were “⁶ in Christ”—they were “⁷ a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, “a peculiar people.”—That is, these terms

⁵ Rom. viii. 33. i. 6. 7.

⁶ viii. 1.

⁷ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

were

were employed to distinguish the professors of christianity from the rest of mankind, in the same manner as the names of Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile, distinguished the people of Greece and Israel from other nations. The application of such phrases to the whole *body* of christians is become now obscure; partly, because it is not easy to conceive of christians as a *body* at all, by reason of the extent of their name and numbers, and the little visible union that subsists among them; and partly, because the heathen world with whom they were compared, and to which comparison these phrases relate, is now ceased, or is removed from our observation.—Supposing therefore these expressions to have a perpetual meaning, and either forgetting the original use of them, or finding *that*, at this time, in a great measure exhausted and insignificant, we resort to a sense and an application of them, easier it may be to our comprehension, but extremely foreign from the design of their authors, namely, to distinguish individuals amongst us, the professors of Christianity from one another—agreeably to which idea the most flattering of

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these

these names, the "elect," "called," "saints," have by bold and unlearned men been appropriated to themselves and their own party with a presumption and conceit, injurious to the reputation of our religion amongst "them that are without," and extremely disgusting to the sober part of its professors: whereas, that such titles were intended in a sense common to all christian converts is well argued from many places in which they occur, in which places you may plainly substitute the terms *convert* or *converted* for the strongest of these phrases without any alteration of the author's meaning, e. g. "I dare any of you go to Law before the unjust and not before the *saints*?" "Is any man *called* being circumcised, let him not become uncircumcised?" "The church that is at Babylon *elect*ed together with you saluteth you" — "Salute Andronicus and Junia who were *in Christ* before me."

3. In opposition to the Jews who were so much offended by the preaching of the Gospel

¹ Cor. vi. 1. ² vii. 18. ³ 1 Pet v. 13. ⁴ Rom. xvi. 7.

to

to the Gentiles, St. Paul maintains with great industry, that it was God Almighty's intention from *the first* to substitute at a fit season into the place of the rejected Israelites a society of men, taken indifferently out of all nations under heaven, and admitted to be the people of God upon easier and more comprehensive terms—this is expressed in the Epistle to the Ephesians as follows ; “ ‘ having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath *purposed in himself*, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ.” — The scheme of collecting such a society was what God *foreknew* before the foundation of the world ; was what he did *predestinate* ; was the *eternal purpose* which he purposed in Christ Jesus ; and by consequence this society in their *collective* capacity were the objects of this *foreknowledge*, *predestination*, and *purpose* ; that is, in the language of the apostles they were they “ ‘ whom “ he did *foreknow*,” they whom he did *predestinate*” — they were *chosen in Christ* before

⁵ Eph. i. 9. 10, also see Eph. iii. 5, 6. ⁶ Rom. viii. 29

⁷ Eph. i. 4.

“ the

the foundation of the world" — they were "*elect* according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father." This doctrine has nothing in it harsh or obscure.—But what have we made of it?—The rejection of the Jews, and the adopting another community into their place, composed, whilst it was carrying on, an object of great magnitude in the attention of the inspired writers who understood and observed it.—This event, which engaged so much the thoughts of the Apostle, is now only read of, and hardly that—the reality and the importance of it are little known or attended to—Losing sight therefore of the proper occasion of these expressions, yet willing after our fashion to adapt them to ourselves, and finding nothing else in our circumstances that suited with them, we have learnt at length to apply them to the final destiny of individuals at the day of judgment; and upon this foundation has been erected a doctrine which lays the ax at once to the root of all religion, that of an absolute appointment to salvation or perdition, independant

1. Pet. i. 2.

of

of ourselves or any thing we can do: and, what is extraordinary, those very arguments and expressions, (Rom. Chap. ix. x. xi.) which the Apostle employed to vindicate the impartial Mercies of God, against the narrow and excluding claims of Jewish prejudice, have been interpreted to establish a dispensation the most arbitrary and partial that could be devised.

4. The conversion of a grown person from heathenism to christianity, which is the case of conversion commonly intended in the epistles, was a change of which we have now no just conception—it was a new name, a new language, a new society; a new faith, a new hope; a new object of worship, a new rule of life; a history was disclosed full of discovery and surprise; a prospect of futurity was unfolded, beyond imagination awful and august; the same description applies in a great part though not entirely to the conversion of a Jew.—This accompanied as it was with the pardon of every former sin, (Romans iii. 25.) was such an aera in a man's life, so remarkable a period in his recollection

tion, such a revolution of every thing that was most important to him, as might well admit those strong figures and significant allusions by which it is described in scripture—it was a “⁵ *regeneration*,” or a new birth—it was to be “⁶ born again of God and of the spirit”—it was to be “⁷ dead to sin,” and “⁸ alive from the dead”—it was to be “⁹ buried with Christ in baptism, and raised together with him”—it was “¹⁰ a new creature” and “¹¹ a new creation”—it was a translation from the conditions of “¹² slaves to that of sons”—from “¹³ strangers and foreigners to be fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.”—It is manifest that no change equal or similar to the conversion of a heathen can be experienced by us, or by any one educated in a christian country, and to whom the facts, precepts and hopes of christianity have been from his infancy familiar—yet we will retain the same language—and what has been the consequence?

⁵ Tit. iii. 5.⁶ John. i. 13. iii. 5.⁷ Rom. vi. 2. 13.⁸ Col. ii. 12.⁹ 2 Cor. v. 17.¹⁰ Eph. iv. 24.¹¹ Gal. iv. 7.¹² Eph. ii. 19.

One sort of men, observing nothing in the lives of christians, corresponding to the magnificence, if I may so say, of these expressions, have been tempted to conclude, that the expressions themselves had no foundation in truth and nature, or in any thing but the enthusiasm of their authors.—Others again understand these phrases to signify nothing more, than that gradual amendment of life and conversation, which reason and religion sometimes produce in particular christians—of which interpretation it is truly said, that it degrades too much the proper force of language, to apply expressions of such energy and import to an event, so ordinary in its own nature, and which is common to christianity with every other moral institution. Lastly, a third sort, in order to satisfy these expressions to their full extent, have imagined to themselves certain perceptible impulses of the Holy Ghost, by which, in an instant, and in a manner, no doubt sufficiently extraordinary, they are “*regenerate and born of the spirit*”—they become “*new creatures*”—they are made the “*sons of God,*” who were before the “*children of wrath,*”—they are “*freed from*
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fin," and "from death"—they are chosen, that is, and sealed, without a possibility of fall, unto final salvation.—Whilst the patrons of a more sober exposition have been often challenged, and sometimes confounded with the question—If such expressions of scripture do not mean *this*, what do they mean? To which we answer—nothing—nothing, that is, to us—nothing to be found, or sought for, in the present circumstances of christianity.

More examples might be produced, in which the unwary use of scripture language has been the occasion of difficulties and mistakes—but I forbear—the present are sufficient to show, that it behoves every one, who undertakes to explain the scriptures, before he determine to whom, or what an expression is now a days to be applied, to consider diligently whether they admit of any such application at all; or whether it is not rather to be restrained to the precise circumstances and occasion for which it was originally composed.

I make

I make no apology for addressing this subject to this audience ; because whatever relates to the interpretation of scripture, relates, as I conceive, to us ; for, if, by any light we may cast upon these ancient books, we can enable and invite the people to read the Bible for themselves, we discharge in my judgment the first duty of our function — ever bearing in mind that we are the ministers not of our own fame or fancies, but of the sincere Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I make no apology for addressing this subject to this audience ; because whatever relates to the interpretation of scripture, relates as I conceive, to us ; for, if, by any light we may cast upon these ancient books, we can enable and inspire the people to read the Bible for themselves : in my judgment the first duty of our function — ever bearing in mind that we are the ministers not of our own fancies or fancies, but of the sincere Gospel of Jesus Christ.



